

**The Love of Enemies**  
**Archimandrite Joel Giannakopoulos (†1966)**



(Source: *H Ζωή του Χριστού*, τ. 2, pp. 89-102)

**(Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-28, 31-40)**

On the previous subject of tolerance, we have reached the top of the Lord's Sermon on the Mount. But already, through the love of enemies, we shall ascend to the summit of the summit of the Lord's Sermon on the Mount. Let's see.

The Lord, completing the Hebrew law of love, says: **“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy.”** This “love your neighbour” is mentioned in Leviticus 19:18. But the “hate your enemy” is a commandment of the Scribes. By the word *neighbour*, the Hebrew law means the Jew. The Scribes, however, interpreted “hate your enemy” from this despite the law because the law commanded the love of enemies Exodus 23:4. To this nationalistic and perverse interpretation of the Scribes, the Lord offers the general universal love of enemies through words, works and prayer, exemplifying the universal love of God as follows:

**“But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; and bless them that curse you.”**

In justifying this love, the Lord characteristically says: **“For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? what thank have ye?”** What's your beauty? **“Do not even the publicans”** [Those who pressed the property of God's people, the Hebrews, into taxation for the sake of foreign conquerors, were hated by the Hebrews.] **“And sinners do the same? And if ye only salute [greet] your brethren, what do ye more than others?”** What more than the publicans and unrepentant do you do? **“For the nations”** [the idolotars] **“also do the same? And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? For sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.”** The debtors or other loans and those in need. **“But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again;”** [That is, not despairing of your enemies, and refusing to lend to them, neither despairing if ye lose the loan] **“and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”** And God **“is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.”** The Lord says that His Father rains on the righteous and the unjust, that the highest good is His will and

bears the most vivid example of God, who rains on and illuminates all people. Clarity reveals wisdom.

The Lord succinctly says, **“As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.”** Not as you are treated, but as you would like to be treated by others; this is how you should treat them. The Lord, declaring that he who does not love his enemy but curses him transgresses the law of love and enters into the jurisdiction of God, for which he will be punished, says, **“Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.”** The Lord, recommending affability and kindness to our enemies, adds, **“Give, and it shall be given unto you.”** What will be given? **“Good measure pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again.”** The measure is the container, which measures the grain. This is filled, focused, moved, and fulfilled until it is poured. Our intercession to all must be just as full to receive this reward from God, for by whatever measure of mercy we judge others by the same will God judge us.

Faithful Christians should be the light of people, especially in love. To this end, they must not be spiritually blind but must imitate their Master. Therefore, the Lord says, **“Can the blind lead the blind? Shall they not both fall into the ditch?”** When one blind man leads the other, they will both fall into the pit. Christ is the only guide. **“The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master;”** Christ Who loved enemies.

Finally, it places the final seal, **“Be ye therefore perfect, even as My Father is perfect.”** God's example is presented not as a degree of perfection since we cannot achieve it but as an ideal, which should inspire and elevate each of us as high as possible according to his natural and supernatural powers. In general, this commandment of loving one's enemies, which is sacrificial, advances us beyond the ideal of righteousness in the pre-Christian world.

Those who deny Christ, to justify themselves because they do not follow Christ, claimed that those things which Christ said were said by others before Him and, therefore, Christ has nothing new. Therefore, examining love before and after Christ is a matter of the utmost importance so that the great difference between the Christian and pre-Christian worlds can be seen.

## Pre-Christian Love

From ancient times until the time of Christ, the world has known love, friendship, justice, and hospitality, but not the love of enemies. They loved the people of the same blood. They took care to give justice and mutual tolerance to the citizens of the same city. The stranger should have expected nothing but hatred and uprooting if he was not a guest. Zeus protects travellers and strangers. The stranger, who knocks at the door of the ancient Greek, receives food, drink and sleep. Outside the family, there was partial love; within the city, the idol was justice. Outside the walls and borders was unquenchable hate.

Yet some voices were raised in different times and places of the pre-Christian world, seeking love beyond the family among the people of that nation. They sought a little justice for the stranger and the enemy, but these voices were weak to him, few in number, scattered in distant lands and distant times, so we cannot say that they gave birth by evolution to Christ's teaching of love. Let us look at those few weak, scattered, distant voices of the pre-Christian world about the love of enemies.

### I. In China.



400 years before Christ, a wise man of China, Micius (c. 470 – c. 391 BC), in his book, [\*Mozi\*](#), declares the love of all men, saying:

“Suppose we try to locate the cause of disorder, we shall find it lies in the want of mutual love. What is called disorder is just the lack of filial piety on the part of the minister and the son towards the emperor and the father; As he loves himself and not his father the son benefits himself to the disadvantage of his father. As he loves himself and not his elder brother, the younger brother benefits himself to the disadvantage of his elder brother. As he loves himself and not his emperor, the minister benefits himself to the disadvantage of his emperor. And these are what is called disorder. When the father shows no affection to the son, when the elder brother shows no affection to the younger brother, and when the emperor shows no affection to the minister, on the other hand, it is also called disorder. When the father loves only himself and not the son, he benefits himself to the disadvantage of the son. When the elder brother loves only himself and not his younger brother, he benefits himself to the disadvantage of the younger brother. When the emperor loves only himself and not his minister, he benefits himself to

the disadvantage of his minister, and the reason for all these is want of mutual love.”  
(Book 4: Universal Love I)

“This is true even among thieves and robbers. As he loves only his own family and not other families, the thief steals from other families to profit his own family. As he loves only his own person and not others, the robber does violence to others to profit himself. And the reason for all this is want of love. This again is true in the mutual disturbance among the houses of the ministers and the mutual invasions among the states of the feudal lords. As he loves only his own house and not the others, the minister disturbs the other houses to profit his own. As he loves only his own state and not the others, the feudal lord attacks the other states to profit his own. These instances exhaust the confusion in the world. And when we look into the causes we find they all arise from want of mutual love.” (Book 4: Universal Love I)

For the wise Micius, this love, which is rather the respect of the younger towards the older and the leniency of the older towards the younger, is far from being called the love of enemies. It is rather a medicine for the maintenance of citizens and states; it is a social panacea.

The famous Lao Tzu (c. 6th - 5th century BC), living in China, suggests we should respond to insults with kindness. But sweetness and gentleness are one thing, and love of enemies is another.



At that time and in that country, Confucius (c. 551 – c. 479 BCE) preached a teaching which, according to his disciple Zeng Shen, commanded us to love our neighbour as ourselves.

But he expressly pointed out that we should love our neighbour and not the “distant,” the stranger, the enemy. Therefore, Confucius established friendly love and kindness, which are necessary for the prosperity of nations, but he did not think to strike at hatred by constituting the love of enemies. In the book *The Analects*, where we find the parables of Zeng Shen, we find these words, which have been taken from the ancient Confucian text of *Great Learning*: “The righteous man is capable of loving and hating men as he thinks fit.” [Only the ren [i.e. humane] person can love others and hate others.] ([Book IV:3](#))

## II. In India.

The Buddha, a contemporary of Confucius, taught that it is our duty to love all people, even the most wretched and despised. We must also love all living beings, including the least among animals. But in Buddhism, the love of other people is aimed at completely eradicating self-love, for this love of self is the primary foundation of our existence. The Buddha, i.e. wants to abolish pain, and to abolish pain, he sees no other way than to drown the individual soul of each one in the general universal soul, which is Nirvana, Nothingness. Consequently, the Buddhist did not love his brother out of love for him but out of love for himself, to avoid pain, to take a step towards extinction. His universal love is cold, a form of stoic indifference to pain and joy.

## III. In Egypt.

Each deceased brought to the grave a copy of the Book of the Dead, an apology of his soul before the court of Osiris. The dead man praises himself, saying, "I have not caused pain! I have not caused weeping! I have not killed! I have not commanded to kill! I have not cheated anyone! ... I gave my bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, sacrifice to the gods, memorial dinners for the dead." Therefore, we find as the most perfect works the works of justice and mercy [did they do these too?], but we do not find love at all and indeed love of the enemies.



Let's study an inscription of the great king Pepi I Meryre (24th century BC) to see how the Egyptians treated their enemies: "This army marched in peace, entered, as it pleased them, into the land of Hirushaitu. This army entered in peace and cut down the fig trees and vines. They set fire to all the houses. This army entered in peace. They slaughtered their soldiers by the myriad. This army marched in peace. They took captives, a large number of men, women and children. Therefore, more than anything else, it rejoices in her holiness." How different from the love of enemies!

## IV. In Persia

Zarathustra left a law to the people of Iran. This law ordered the believers of Ahura Mazda (lit. 'Lord of Wisdom') to be kind to their co-religionists, to give clothing to the



naked, and not to refuse bread to the hungry worker. And here it is about the material reward of those who serve us, those who belong to us, our neighbours, etc. However, there is no mention of love for enemies.

## **V. In Greece.**

In the last book of the [\*Iliad\*](#), we see Priam kissing the hand of his worst enemy, the one who has killed his children and who has just killed his most beloved child. Priam, the ancient king of Troy, the lord of great material goods, the father of 50 children, is kneeling at the feet of Achilles, the greatest hero of the Greeks, the most unfortunate of men, the avenger of Patroclus and the murderer of Hector. The white head of the old man rolls before the untroubled youth of the victor. Priam weeps for his slain son, the strongest, the fairest, the loveliest of his fifty sons, and kisses the hand of him who slew him. “And thou,” saith Priam to Achilles, “hast a long father, an elder, weak and defenceless. In the name of your father's love, give me at least my son's body.”

Achilles, the slaughterer, the wild one, gently pushes the begging old man away and begins to cry. And the two enemies, victor and vanquished, the father, who no longer has children, and the son, who will no longer see his father, the old man with white hair and the young man with youthful hair, both weep together, brothers for the first time in pain. The bystanders observe in amazement and silence!

And for us today, after 30 centuries, it is impossible for us not to be moved by their sobs. But in Priam's kiss, there is neither apology nor love. Priam humbles himself at the feet of Achilles to obtain a difficult and unusual favour. Achilles does not weep for Hector or Priam but for his dead friend, Patroklus. He weeps for Peleus, abandoned by Phthian, his father, who will never see him again because he knows his days are numbered.

Therefore, each of the two weeps for himself. Priam's kiss is not love but a cruel need. Achilles returns the son's body to the father after he had found it in the dust, and because Zeus commanded it, and not because his anger had subsided. In antiquity's nobler, more heroic world, there is no place for love, which destroys hate but replaces it. There is no love stronger than hate. No love is more fiery, indomitable, and loyal than hate. There is only oblivion of evil and no love of the enemy. Therefore, only Christ spoke of the love of enemies in His Sermon on the Mount. It is this love that is the greatness and greatest novelty of Christ, His everlasting and new greatness. It is new even for us because we have not implemented it, but it is eternal like the Truth.

Is it possible in ancient Greece, which is the source of all education, that there was no love of enemies there? "Everything existed in ancient Greece," the deniers of Christ say. Let us see.

In Sophocles' [\*Ajax\*](#), the famous Odysseus is moved before his enemy because he has been reduced to great misery. Athena, the Greek wisdom personified in the sacred *glauca* (owl), reminds him that the most pleasant laughter is to laugh at his enemy's misery. Odysseus is unconvinced and says: "I sympathize with him, though he has been my enemy, for I see him unhappy, and seeing him I reflect on the vanity of men, that we are all ghosts and light shadows... It is not right to harm a man who is dying, even if he has harmed you." The wicked one here, Odysseus, is not so cunning that the reasons for his little natural tenderness are not apparent. He sympathizes with his enemy because he ponders himself and forgives him because he sees him wretched and dying.

Another one, wiser than Odysseus, Socrates, spoke about the problem of the love of enemies. But we are surprised to note that we can distinguish two Socrates with opposite opinions. According to Xenophon, Socrates eloquently accepts the public opinion that we should treat our enemies badly and our friends well. He says to the Chaerecrat, "I take it to be the part of a heroic and generous soul to prevent our friends with kindness and our enemies with valour." In his words: "And not for the most part he is a man worthy of praise, who reaches out to those who fight evil, but to his friends who do good" Xenophon. [\*Memoirs\*](#) II, 3, § 14. But Plato's Socrates does not accept this opinion. "There is no need," he says to Crito, "to repay injustice for injustice, evil for evil, whatever the insult we receive." Plato affirms the same in his [\*The Republic\*](#), adding that "the wicked do not become better with revenge."

What, therefore, prevails in the head of Socrates is the thought of justice and not the feeling of love. In no case should the righteous man do evil, not out of love for his enemy, but out of respect for himself. Every man must punish himself. Otherwise, the Judges of Hades will punish him after his death. Plato's pupil, Aristotle, will revert to the old popular idea that "he who does not return insults - he says in the [\*Ethical Nicomacheans\*](#) - is a coward and a slave."



## VI. In Rome.

The deniers of Christ saw Seneca as an equal to Christ in Rome. This Seneca was a man who directed the consciences of the rulers of the Roman Empire towards his reformed cynicism. He is an aristocratic philosopher with abstract concepts without emotion toward the suffering of the humble. He is the rich man who, by reason, despises riches, but in reality, he is a zealous guardian of them! He preached equality between freemen and slaves, and yet he had many slaves! This man had an anatomical demon of various cases of evil, anxieties, real flaws, and uncertain virtues, but he also committed suicide! He said the wise should not take revenge but forget the insult. He must imitate the gods who are kind to the ungrateful because the sun shines on the wicked, and the sea tolerates corsairs. We must help the enemy with a friendly hand". The ethical Seneca wrote most of his works after Christ because he committed suicide in AD 65. Therefore, many of his words are Christian and not his own.

## VII. In Palestine.

Others say that they find love of enemies in the Old Testament, which commands the following: "And if thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt turn them back and restore them to him. And if thou see thine enemy's ass fallen under its burden, thou shalt not pass by it, but shalt help to raise it with him" (Exodus 23:4-5). But even this is not called love of enemies, but reciprocity and solidarity for the following reason. The ram was a precious animal in those times and places. Friends and foes had their own oxen. Is your enemy's ox gone today? Your ox may leave tomorrow. Give thou a helping hand this day, that thou mayest receive it from thine enemy tomorrow.

The psalms are full of threats and curses against the enemies. In a world constructed like this, it was fair to wonder why Saul was surprised because David's enemy did not kill him. Only in the proverbs, which were written later, do we find quotes similar to those of Christ: **"Say not, I will avenge myself on my enemy; but wait on the Lord, that he may help thee"** (Proverbs 20:22) But again here the enemy awaits the punishment of his enemy by stronger hands, God. There is also this: "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink" (Proverbs 25:21). This is progress because love from the enemy's donkey reaches that enemy. But because of this cowardly maxim, hidden in a corner of the Holy Scriptures, they certainly cannot be led to the miracles of the love of the enemies of the Lord's speech on the mountain.

Others claim that the great rabbi [Hillel](#), the teacher of Gamaliel, this famous Pharisee who lived a little before Christ, taught the same things that Christ taught afterwards. He said: "Do not do unto others what you would not have others do unto you. This is the whole law; the rest is but a commentary on the law." But how far from the words of Christ! Hillel says, "Do not do"; he does not say "Do good" to anyone who does you harm. "Do not do" is a negation, not a position; it is a lukewarm prohibition not to harm but not an absolute command to love.

Moreover, the descendants of Hillel are the [Talmudists](#), who have taken the law into the sea of casuistry and litigation. But the descendants of Christ, the martyrs, stood up for those who killed them. And Philo, the Alexandrian Jew, a metaphysical Platonist 20 years older than Christ, wrote a little textbook on the love of men. But Philo, with all his intelligence and secret and messianic calculations, is, like Hillel, a theoretician, a man of the book, of systems, of abstract concepts, of classifications. His strategic dialectic moves thousands of words into juxtaposition, but he cannot find that word which eliminates the past in a moment, the word which unites hearts. He spoke of love more than Christ but did not dare to say or understand the love of enemies, which Christ said to his simple, unlearned disciples in the Sermon on the Mount.

If we want to characterize the pre-Christian world in this regard in a few words, we will see that it, starting from injustice, idealized justice, while Christ, starting from justice, idealized sacrifice.

**General observation:** The Stoic, the Pharisee, the proud philosopher by his wisdom, the righteous satisfied by his justice, can despise the insults of the small, the bites of enemies can and will endure, in order to appear magnanimous and to win the admiration of the people, to cast a piece of bread upon their hungry enemy, and to humble him even more cruelly than the height of their professed excellence, in stoical apathy, in Pharisaic hypocrisy, in philosophic selfishness, and in the smug sense of justice. But this bread is leavened and baked with the yeast of vanity, and this friendly hand cannot bind a wound nor shed a tear.

## Christian Love

We looked at pre-Christian love. Let us also look at Christian love. This law of the love of the enemies of the Lord can be divided into three parts:

1. In the commandment,
2. In the manner of application, and
3. In the reward.

### I. The Commandment

"Love your enemies." First of all. What enemies are we talking about? Are the enemies of faith and country included? The Lord, as in abolishing murder, he struck out the root of it, wrath; as in abolishing sin of the flesh, he struck out the root of it, the evil eye; as in abolishing swearing and perjury, he struck out the root of it, the oath; in like manner he struck out, and in the same manner, he struck out the root of all enmity, which is none other than personal enmity. Therefore, enemies here are our personal enemies, those who harmed us by word and deed, whoever they are. Let us settle our personal enmity by forgiving our enemies, and let's leave the sense of justice that rises up in us against them and is often confused with our selfishness to be settled by God or the state.

But the question arises. Why should I forgive my enemies? Is that reasonable? Answer. He that forgiveth not his enemies hath three great evils. First, he is unreasonable; second, he is unhappy; and third, he is the most ruthless. Aye!

Firstly. He is unreasonable because by what right does he hate his enemy since he falls into the same error, for which he hates his enemy, i.e. in hatred? Then, by what right do we hate our enemy for his sins since we ourselves are also sinners? Do we hate because we are not in that sin wherein he is? However, we are in another. Can a lame man on his right foot curse a lame man on his left foot? Certainly not! By what right, then, do we hate our enemy when we are almost always responsible for his hatred by the monstrous love we have for ourselves?

Second. Haters are unhappy. And indeed! The hater is the first to suffer, for hate is the worst wound. Besides this, the hater is miserable because he misjudges the benefit that his enemy offers him. The enemy is our saviour. He alone sees and speaks of our shortcomings without pretense and hypocrisy. He can see more deficiencies than we

have. But it would be evil if he saw and spoke less. The friend neither always sees nor speaks so freely of our shortcomings. Therefore, by his brutality, our enemy tells us our true condition and awakens the conscience of our moral deficiency. This is to our advantage because through it, we shall be tested in the virtues of patience, perseverance, meekness, love, etc., and the awakening of the conscience of our moral impoverishment, as having humility as its material is the necessary condition of our new life. The cause of all this is our enemy with his brutal tongue.

In the face of all these benefactions our enemy gives and the absurdity of our hatred for him, we ought to express our gratitude to him. But how? Through love. Love is the only way to heal the wound of his hatred and express yourself to your enemy. And indeed! Our enemy needs our love, especially our love. Our friend, who loves us, has no need of our love, for he has no wound of hatred. But he, who hates us, brings the bitterness of his pain out of his soul. He hates us because he suffers for what we are and we are responsible for his suffering. But if, in your arrogant conviction that you are innocent, you turn away from him, bear in mind that it is your duty to sweeten your enemy's pain with your love, to ease his pain, to calm him, to make him better, to bring him to the bliss of love. By loving thine enemy, thou shalt know him better, and by knowing him better, thou shalt love him more. By loving thine enemy, thou shalt purify thine own spirit and exalt his spirit also. Therefore out of the hatred of thine enemy toward thee, which divides, great light may be born!

## **II. The Method of Applying this Commandment.**

This way is threefold:

- a) "Bless them that curse you," says the Lord; that is, we must speak good words to those who revile us. This is not to say that we are to accept as true their false insults but to find other aspects of those who insult us that are commendable. It is impossible to imagine that someone is completely deprived of gifts because he is our enemy. Therefore, we may praise his intelligence, morality, or any other virtue he has.
- b) "Do good to those who hate you." We should praise our enemies not only for words but also for deeds. The apostle Paul eloquently says the following: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him water; these are the coals of fire you are heaping on his head." The coals of fire are the checks of conscience

and shame, which will be born in the soul of your beloved enemy. Therefore, when your enemy falls into your hands, be sure to treat him with your love.

- c) But if you cannot express your love to your enemy either through words or actions, you can resort to prayer. For this reason, the Lord adds: "Pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you." The "despiteful users" are those who act hostile by accident and on occasion, while the "persecutors" are those who regularly and systematically hate us. Therefore, here is the threefold way of applying the love of our enemies: by word, by work, and by prayer.

### **III. Remuneration.**

What is the reward? Saint Chrysostom echoes. The reward is "the most terrifying of all, to be made like God." Yes, Indeed! For the merciful, the Lord promised as a reward that they would "be pardoned;" for the pure in heart, he promised as a reward that they would "see God," for the mourners that they would be "comforted," for the unjustly persecuted, that their reward is "great in the heavens." Still, for those who love their enemies, he promised "to be made like God" as a reward! That which was used as an enticement to Adam and Eve, that they would be like God if they broke his commandment, is now given as a reward for loving their enemies. To further emphasize this reward, the Lord exemplifies His Father, who "maketh his sun to rise on the wicked and the good, and sendeth rain on the righteous and the unrighteous," that is, on the wicked and the good. But we may say, emphasizing God's love for us, 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' (Jn. 3:16) And, "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8)

Wonderful examples of applying the love of enemies are the prayers of martyrs of the faith for their persecutors. One of the many that Châteaubriand mentions in his [\*The Martyrs\*](#) is the following: During the times of the persecutions in Lacedaemon, clerics and laymen were arrested by the unbelieving lord there and imprisoned, to be killed the next day. The imprisoned martyrs, before being executed, wished to receive the communion of the Immaculate Mysteries and to pray for their persecutors. However, there was no Holy Table. The old imprisoned Bishop is sprawled on the ground, and the priests and deacons present are performing the service on him. At the moment when this devout liturgy was performed before they took communion, the clergy and people in prison prayed for their rulers and persecutors. Then they communed, and the next day, they were martyred. How touching is this love of enemies!

## Conclusions.

Here is the commandment to love one's enemies, the depth of this commandment, the way of its implementation and its highest reward. Do we also love our enemies? Alas! Not only our enemies we do not love, but not our friends, our parents. An observation, a serious attitude by people who have acted fraudulently to us, is tolerable. In such a case, we are worse than tax collectors, who, according to the Lord's assurance, "love those who love them" and greet "those who kiss them" by embracing "them." But then, this love is not Christian and, therefore, has no value. Let us, therefore, love our enemies so that we may be like our God. May it happen!





